

Street art

Street art is nothing new. Throughout history, people have decorated the walls that surround them with words and images. But it's only recently that the art world has begun to take it seriously, with major exhibitions at leading galleries such as MASP in São Paulo, Brazil and MOCA in Los Angeles, United States. Specialised street art galleries have also begun to open up, including Lab Art in Los Angeles and the Boiler House in Cardiff, Wales. One of the best-known street artists, Banksy, has recently received awards for his film *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, although his face doesn't appear on screen as he prefers to remain unseen. What is no secret is the soaring value of street art – buildings which feature Banksy's images have been known to double in value!

Not everyone is a fan, however. Police in Los Angeles are reported to have complained that the *Art in the Streets* exhibition at MOCA led to an increase in graffiti in the neighbourhood. Much graffiti is far from artistic, consisting mainly of 'tags', which are usually hurried and untidy symbols or letters that do no more than identify the person who made them. What concerns critics is not just the ugliness of much graffiti, but the enormous sums required to clean up the mess. Cleaning graffiti off London buses, for instance, costs an estimated £10m every year. And then there is the very real risk of injury or electrocution to the taggers themselves as they trespass on dangerous areas, such as high buildings and railways lines, in search of new places to make their mark.

Stiff penalties, including prison sentences, have been introduced in order to deter taggers and there has been heavy investment in surveillance in order to catch offenders red-handed. There are, for example, 60,000 CCTV cameras on London buses alone. What this approach fails to do, however, is to distinguish between street art and graffiti. In London, even works by famous artists, such as Banksy, have been removed on the grounds that if they were left in place, this would be seen as condoning graffiti. Some cities have opted instead for a more educational approach. In the US city of Washington, DC, the Murals DC project trains local children in more creative street art in the hope that they will learn to care more both for art and for their environment.

1 Which paragraph of the text best matches the title below?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Official policy towards street art | paragraph _____ |
| 2 The growing prestige of street art | paragraph _____ |
| 3 Street art – the downside | paragraph _____ |

2 Decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F). Circle the correct statements and correct those that are false.

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|--|-------|
| 1 MASP is a major street art gallery in South America. | T / F |
| 2 Banksy has been successful in both the art and the film world | T / F |
| 3 Banksy tries to increase the value of buildings through his art. | T / F |
| 4 Police in Los Angeles have criticised the exhibition at the gallery there. | T / F |
| 5 Taggers spend large sums of money in order to practise their art. | T / F |
| 6 Tagging puts the lives of the general public at risk. | T / F |
| 7 Banksy has been removed from London in order to deter graffiti. | T / F |
| 8 The Murals DC project focuses on education rather than punishment. | T / F |

3 Complete the word-building table using these words from the text.

verb	nouns	adjective
decorate		
		specialised
	injury	
	investment	
	offender	
distinguish		
opt		
		educational

4 *What is no secret is the soaring value of street art* (paragraph 1) is an example of a 'cleft sentence', in which something that usually comes later in a sentence is moved closer to the beginning in order to give extra emphasis. So, in an ordinary sentence, *is no secret* would be in the second half: *The soaring value of street art is no secret*. Find two other examples of cleft sentences, and write the ordinary sentences they have been made from.

5 Complete these cleft sentences with your own ideas.

- 1 What interested me most in this article was _____ .
- 2 What I'd really like to know about Banksy is _____ .
- 3 What I find hard to understand about the street art exhibitions is _____ .
- 4 What bus and train companies should do about graffiti is _____ .
- 5 What taggers should have to do is _____ .
- 6 What _____ me about street artists is _____ .

6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- What are the best and worst examples of local street art or graffiti?
- Do you agree that galleries which hold street art exhibitions are condoning graffiti?
- What do you think is the best way of dealing with tagging?

Glossary

- soar** (*verb*) - rise sharply
- electrocution** (*noun*) - death or serious injury caused by contact with electricity
- trespass** (*verb*) - enter a place where you don't have permission to go
- stiff penalty** (*adjective + noun*) - severe punishment
- surveillance** (*noun*) - recording, filming or watching someone's movements, especially if they are suspected of criminal activity
- CCTV** (*noun*) Closed Circuit Television, usually cameras used by police and security companies to control behaviour in public places
- catch someone red-handed** (*idiom*) - catch someone in the act of doing something wrong
- condone** (*verb*) - approve of behaviour that many others think is wrong
- prestige** (*noun*) - high level of reputation and respect